

1 INTRODUCTION

The Antelope Valley Wildlife Area (AVWA) and Smithneck Creek Wildlife Area (SCWA) are located in Sierra County, southwest of Loyalton (Exhibit 1-1). AVWA consists of approximately 5,700 acres of Great Basin montane habitat on the southern edge of the Sierra Valley. It includes the main Antelope Valley Unit, located in the Antelope Valley Creek Watershed, and the Merry-Go-Round Unit. The Antelope Valley Creek Watershed is a tributary to the Feather River, a nationally designated wild and scenic river. Antelope Valley has historically been used for livestock grazing and small-scale logging, with the earliest documented use in 1922. SCWA is located to the east of AVWA and also consists of approximately 1,385 acres of Great Basin montane habitat on the southeast corner of the Sierra Valley. SCWA consists of the Doe Canyon Unit, Bear Valley Creek Unit, and Badenaugh Unit. SCWA straddles Smithneck Creek, which drains into the Sierra Valley and then to the Feather River. AVWA and SCWA are managed predominantly for winter range habitat critical to the Loyalton-Truckee deer herd. The land surrounding the wildlife areas is largely owned by the Tahoe National Forest, managed by the U.S. Forest Service (USFS). The remaining lands, especially to the north and east, are in private ownership.

This land management plan (LMP) represents the commitment of the California Department of Fish and Game (Department) to manage the important resources of AVWA and SCWA in accordance with the laws of the United States and the State of California. The LMP incorporates the best available scientific information. It also incorporates the commitment of the Department to coordinate and cooperate with neighbors of the wildlife areas, other local interests, and other conservation entities that are active in the area.

1.1 MISSION OF THE CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND GAME

The Department, as part of the Resources Agency of the State of California, has the following mission to guide its planning and operations:

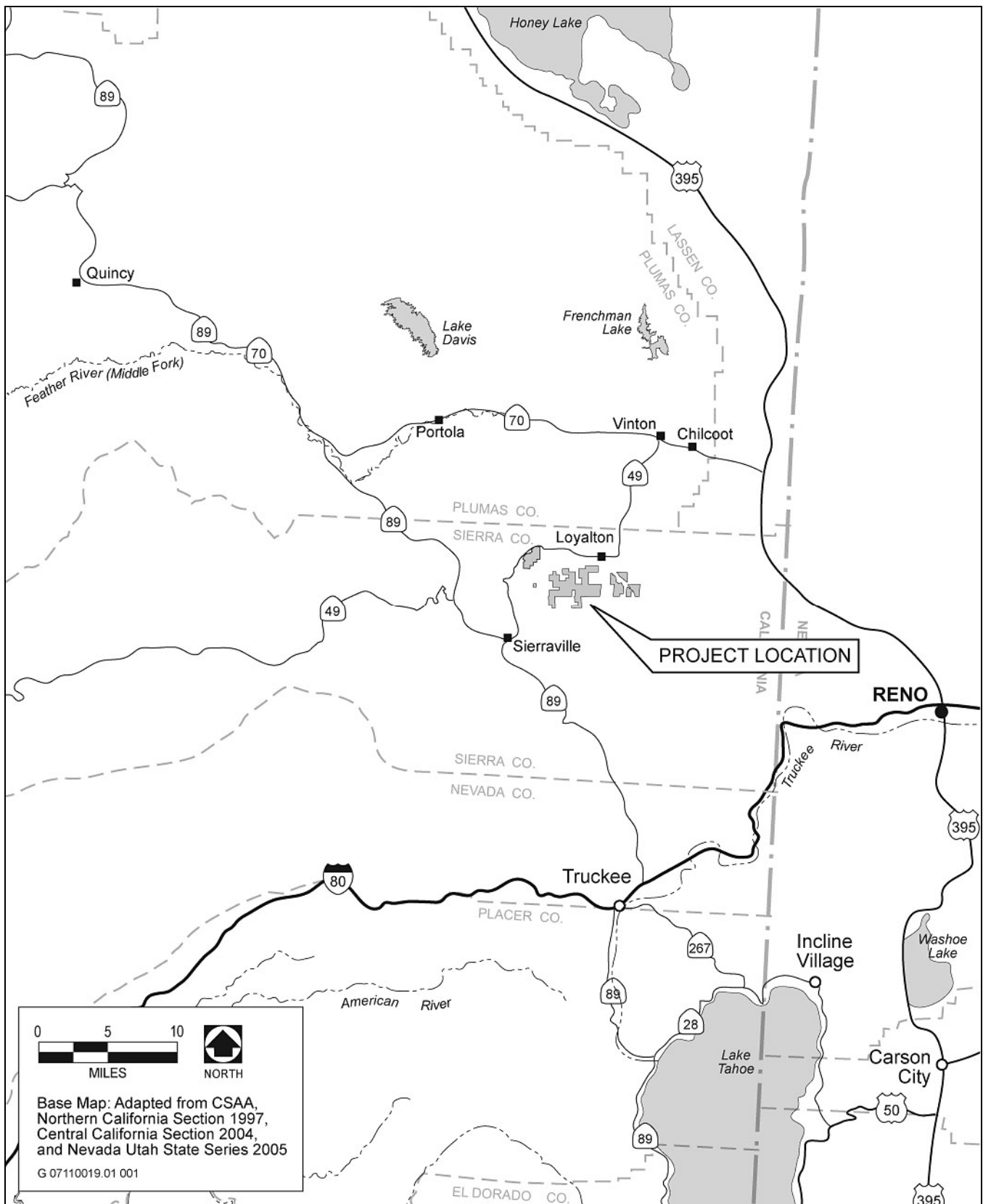
“The mission of the Department of Fish and Game is to manage California’s diverse fish, wildlife, and plant resources, and the habitats upon which they depend, for their ecological values and for their use and enjoyment by the public.”

Thus, the Department manages fish, wildlife, and plant species and natural communities for their intrinsic and ecological value and their benefits to people. This management includes the goal of habitat protection and maintenance in an amount and quality sufficient to ensure the survival of all species and natural communities and the diversified use of fish and wildlife, including recreational, commercial, scientific, and educational uses.

1.2 PURPOSE OF WILDLIFE AREAS

Some of the state’s most important sites for wildlife have been designated as wildlife areas. These lands provide habitat for a wide array of plant and animal species, including many listed as special-status species. Included in this system are AVWA and SCWA. Consistent with its mission, the Department administers more than 100 state wildlife areas composed of approximately 650,000 acres of wildlife habitat. These areas are scattered throughout the state, with most located in central and northern California. The state owns approximately two-thirds of this acreage, while the remainder is managed under agreements with other public agencies. The Department manages these wildlife areas for the following purpose: “To protect and enhance habitat for wildlife species, and to provide the public with compatible, wildlife-related recreational uses.”

Although this is the general purpose for which wildlife areas are managed, wildlife areas differ in their environmental and management settings and in the purpose and history of their acquisition. These differences are the basis of the specific goals that guide the management of individual wildlife areas. Therefore, this plan describes the purpose and history of acquisition of AVWA and SCWA (following in this chapter), the



Source: Data compiled by EDAW in 2007.

Regional Location of the Antelope Valley and Smithneck Creek Wildlife Areas

Exhibit 1-1

management and environmental setting of AVWA and SCWA (in Chapters 2 and 3), and the management goals and associated tasks (in Chapter 4).

1.3 PURPOSE OF ACQUISITION

The AVWA property was acquired in 1980 and expanded in 1993 and 1999 to protect winter range and migration route habitat that is critical to the Loyalton-Truckee deer herd. The properties were purchased by the Wildlife Conservation Board (WCB) on behalf of the Department. WCB purchased the SCWA property in 1988 to protect additional critical deer habitat, including winter range habitat and a major migration corridor. At the time of purchase, the properties were under consideration for development. The primary long-term goals of the wildlife areas are to improve the habitat, primarily for deer, but also for quail, dove, and other game and nongame wildlife species.

1.4 ACQUISITION HISTORY

Originally, WCB acquired 4,480 acres to make up the AVWA property. The acquisition was completed in two phases. In Phase I, WCB purchased 2,080 acres from Nevis Industries, Incorporated, in May 1980. An easement on the property exists for road purposes for ingress and egress. The easement is 30 feet wide and allows access to the grantor's remaining property. In Phase II (Expansion #1), WCB purchased an additional 2,400 acres from Nevis Industries in September 1980. WCB purchased the total of 4,480 acres for \$1,132,000, in-fee, from private owners. WCB acquired AVWA Expansion #2, the Merry-Go-Round Unit, in September 1993 from Bob E. Ferguson, Sr.; Virginia Ferguson; Bob E. Ferguson, Jr.; and Jennifer Ferguson. WCB used the Habitat Conservation Fund to purchase the property for \$463,000. Acquisition became necessary for protection of critical deer habitat after the previous owners rezoned the property and approached Sierra County regarding the submission of a tentative subdivision map for the entire parcel. The grantors retained residences, an outbuilding storage tank, and reservoir. Easements affecting the property are for a telegraph line running from Sierraville in Sierra County to Beckwourth in Plumas County by the Sierra Valley Telegraph Company, an electric transmission or distribution line or system by the Plumas-Sierra Rural Electric Cooperative, communication facilities by the Pacific Telephone and Telegraph Company, and a road by the United States of America. There are easements for diverting, conveying, or storing water as indicated by court decree in January 1940. Two 100-foot-wide State Route (SR) 49 rights-of-way exist on the property and affect approximately 7.92 acres. A management plan for the area acquired in Phase I, II, and Expansion #2 was developed in 1984 and updated in 1997 (Department 1997).

Expansions #3, 4, and 5 were made in September 1998, adding 160 acres to the northwest corner of the main Antelope Valley unit. WCB purchased all expansions using the Habitat Conservation Fund. In Expansion #3, WCB purchased 40 acres for \$60,000 from Fred Willard Van Sant. In Expansion #4, WCB purchased an additional 40 acres for \$60,000 from John Reiting. An easement for a road, utility, and logging affects a 30-foot-wide strip of land on this property. Expansion #5 added an additional 180 acres for \$120,000 from The Misty Corporation. An easement for a roadway and utilities is on the property. The purpose for the acquisition of these parcels was to enhance and protect the integrity of the wildlife area by eliminating private inholdings.

WCB acquired the 1,385-acre SCWA property in 1988 from Occidental Land, Incorporated. The purchase price for the SCWA property was \$500,000 with a land value of \$800,000. Wildlife Restoration Funds were used for the purchase. The primary purpose of the acquisition was the preservation of winter range and a migration corridor for deer. The property had been used historically as part of a cattle operation both on private land and as part of a USFS grazing allotment. The grazing was phased out with the development of the Sierra Brooks subdivision. Occidental Land, Incorporated, retained all mineral rights on the property. Easements exist on the property for a USFS road, a Sierra Pacific Power Company power line, and a road by the United States of America. An agreement for a water service system for the Sierra Brooks subdivision exists between Sierra County Service Area No. 4 and Occidental Petroleum Land and Development Corporation.

After the purchase of the property, Sierra County expressed a concern that the acquisition would reduce their tax base; therefore, the area was designated as a wildlife area to require the Department to pay in-lieu fees. In 1989 Occidental Land, Incorporated, contacted WCB and offered to sell the 600 remaining acres of their land in the area. Field surveys showed that the wildlife habitat values were not as high quality as the land that was already purchased and the offer was declined. The Department wrote a management plan for SCWA in 1990 (Department 1990).

1.5 PURPOSE OF THE LAND MANAGEMENT PLAN

The purpose of this LMP is to:

- ▶ guide management of habitats, species, and programs described in the LMP to achieve the Department's mission to protect and enhance the wildlife areas' ecological values;
- ▶ serve as a guide for appropriate public uses of AVWA and SCWA;
- ▶ serve as a descriptive inventory of fish, wildlife, and native plant species and habitats that occur on AVWA and SCWA;
- ▶ provide an overview of the property's operation and maintenance and of the personnel requirements associated with implementing management goals (this LMP also serves as a budget planning aid for annual regional budget preparation); and
- ▶ present the environmental documentation necessary for compliance with federal and state statutes and regulations, provide a description of potentially significant environmental impacts that may occur during plan management, and identify mitigation measures to avoid or lessen these impacts.

1.6 THE PLANNING PROCESS

The planning process was guided by the general policy parameters that direct the Department, including compliance with all federal and state laws. The Department's mission, the purpose of wildlife areas, the purpose and history of the acquisition of AVWA and SCWA, and the purposes of land management plans, as stated in this chapter, provided broad direction for the development of this plan.

With this broad guidance, the plan has been developed from a compilation of the best available data, additional site-specific analyses, and public input. Public input has been obtained through interviews with knowledgeable individuals and stakeholders and through a public meeting held in Loyalton. A summary of the public input is attached as Appendix A.

1.7 ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS

An environmental analysis pursuant to the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) has been conducted concurrently with plan development to identify the potential environmental impacts of operating AVWA and SCWA under the provisions of this LMP. As described in the initial study/negative declaration (IS/ND) prepared for the plan under CEQA, implementing the plan would not have a significant impact on the environment. The IS/ND is included as Appendix B.

1.8 ORGANIZATION OF THIS LAND MANAGEMENT PLAN

This LMP is organized as follows:

- ▶ **Chapter 1, “Introduction,”** summarizes the purpose of the acquisition, acquisition history, purpose of the land management plan, and planning process.
- ▶ **Chapter 2, “Property Description and Management Setting,”** describes the geographical setting; property boundaries and easements; existing infrastructure; and management setting, including legal constraints, existing agreements, and planning influences and considerations. This chapter (along with Chapter 3) also serves as the environmental setting of the IS/ND.
- ▶ **Chapter 3, “Environmental Setting,”** describes existing resource and regulatory conditions and serves as the environmental setting of the IS/ND.
- ▶ **Chapter 4, “Management Goals,”** describes the basis for resource management at AVWA and SCWA and identifies management goals and tasks. This chapter, as well as Appendix D, serves as the project description necessary for performing environmental review under CEQA.
- ▶ **Chapter 5, “Operations and Maintenance,”** summarizes the number of existing staff employed at the property and any additional requirements for personnel, estimates operations and maintenance costs associated with management of the property, and identifies potential funding sources. This chapter is intended to guide budget preparation and work plans for the property.
- ▶ **Chapter 6, “Future Revisions to This Plan,”** describes the process by which this LMP would be revised, if needed, so that it continues to guide management of AVWA and SCWA.
- ▶ **Chapter 7, “Document Preparers,”** provides a list of individuals responsible for the preparation of the LMP.
- ▶ **Chapter 8, “References,”** provides a list of references used in the creation of the LMP.